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ABSTRACT

Language development and dialect are measures of influences upon a student's ability to learn to read. It has been observed that students whose language differs from that used in schools and in the materials of instruction are often found in remedial reading classes. Their difficulty lies in attempting to learn to read a language which is different from the one they speak. The content teacher can help the student with special language problems to grasp the content of the subject matter, by several methods. These methods include three major areas: (1) a program based on the language experience approach, which attempts to bring reading and other communication skills together in the instructional programs; (2) a program based on directed reading activity, which carefully leads students towards comprehension goals; and (3) a program designed to provide opportunities for the student to hear and to respond to language patterns represented in books. (MB)

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Correlation Between Dialect and Reading Achievement

The competent reader tends to be better informed and hence a more productive person. Reading is essential for effective learning in school and promotes one's personal and social adjustment in a variety of situations (Bond & Tinker, 1967). Since reading is an essential tool for learning, deficiency in reading among school age children has become of increasing concern. With all of the advancements in education, it is quite perplexing to find reading disability to be so prevalent. However, it has been estimated that within the American educational system 15% of otherwise capable students experience difficulty in learning to read (Shaw & Shaw, 1972).

The reasons for reading disabilities are numerous. Among all the factors that are possible causes of reading disability, language development and dialect have become of increasing concern. Because the educational system is geared toward middle class subject matter and vocabulary (standard English), the child who has never experienced these is at a disadvantage. Hence, it has been observed that students whose language differs from that used in school and in the materials of instruction are often found in remedial reading classes. Their difficulty lies in attempting to learn to read a language which is different from the one they speak. These differences represent variation in dialect and language development.

A few research studies (Buckingham, 1940; Harris, 1971;& Karlin, 1972) indicate that speakers of nonstandard English have unique problems in learning to read. Whether these difficulties arise from language usage, language development, or dialect, many educators believe that the language children speak and understand is a significant factor of which teachers of reading need to be aware. These educators maintain that the language patterns of Blacks and other speakers of nonstandard English are quite different from those found in printed materials and that the unfamiliar structures used by writers are obstacles which these children

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find difficulties to overcome (Karlin, 1972).

The printed word is associated with the oral word (or some picture, object, or event) until the child can make the same physiological and psychological responses to the written word that he previously made to the spoken word. Thus it seems that the basic word recognition skill is the ability to associate the sound (spoken word) with the visual stimulus (the written word). When the child becomes able to do this, the meaning that the written word elicits may be easily associated with the spoken word.

Several explanations have been offered concerning how these students become deficient in language skills. The major concern has to do with variation in vocabulary. Black (1971) stated that children of different cultural backgrounds frequently use a great many words with fair precision, but not those words representative of the school culture. Also, Black quoted Figurel in saying "less than half of the words in the vocabulary of the preschool children are know by second-grade children in slum areas." According to Black (1971), this vocabulary problem is the result of: (1) children of different experiences do not perceive the concept that objects have names, and that the same objects have different names, and (2) the use of language by the child chiefly to express his concrete needs, and by his parents and other adults to command the child to perform some function, may contribute to the severe limitation of self-expression.

The compounded evidence does not necessarily suggest a cause and effect relationship. However, the evidence from these studies indicate too much to ignore. Hence, several implications may be reasonably drawn from these studies. The following points should be taken in consideration for teaching reading and should be included in a good reading program for students of different language patterns and experiences:

The first major point of consideration deals with self-concept. There is evidence to suggest that a low or negative self-concept can have adverse effects on school performance. For example, Toller (1968) found significant differences in favor of achievers

on acceptance, adequacy, personal and social self, security, number of problems and consistency of view of self; and Matsunage (1971) found a higher self-concept of ability, a better attitude toward achievement and a more positive image of their teachers' perception of them among achievers. Based on this evidence, it seems obvious that instruction must start with acceptance of the student as he is and his language. Severe attacks of one's language are very personal, for these are insults to one's family and background. Hence, the teacher should avoid mocking and imitating the student's language and should avoid constantly correcting. These negative responses can lead to a student who will feel inferior and thus become a silent student.

The second major point is that a teacher would be unrealistic in expecting students to master printed symbols before spoken ones, and in these programs the emphasis should be on spoken English, with reading instruction paralleling the language instruction (Karlin, 1972). In other words, their unfamiliar language patterns must first be converted into the familiar ones before they can be dealt with, much in the same way a beginning student translates a foreign language into his own (Karlin, 1972).

This point can be achieved by structuring numerous opportunities for the student to hear and to respond to language patterns represented in books and is used in other segments of our society. Some suggested methods are:

1. Read good literature to the student. Allow time for discussions of these materials.

2. Use a variety of films and filmstrips on various topics and various types of literary writings. Allow time for discussions of these materials.

3. Serve as a model for students. Be careful of sentence structure, vocabulary, and clarity of pronunciation.

4. Include discussions of radio and television programs as a part of the regular class schedule.

5. Structure lessons to develop the student's ability to use the language that he will find elsewhere in society and particular in school. This program should include: auditory dis-

crimination - involves practice in hearing differences in language forms, identification of school language - involves practice in distinquishing school language from other language forms, and dialect transfer - involves practice in responding in other language (Wilson, 1972).

The third major point deals with the application of the language-experience approach. This approach is typically used as one of the methods for reading instruction for primary students, but with a few variations it may be used by secondary English and composition teachers. As an English or composition teacher, you are not expected to teach reading per se, however, you are responsible for helping students who have special reading problems to grasp the content of your subject matter. Therefore, the language-experience approach seems to be most useful to the English teacher.

The language-experience approach seems to recognize the close relationship among reading, speaking, writing and listening more so than any other approach to the teaching of reading. With this approach, students learn to read with the support of his auditory memories for words, and his reading progress is certainly conditioned by his own speech development (Spache & Spache, 1969). In other words, this approach attempts to bring reading and other communication skills together in the instructional program. This relationship of skills is the basic objective for a strong English program.

In the language-experience approach, the teacher encourages the student to share his ideals and experiences with others through his oral and written expressions. During the writing of the student's experiences, the teacher discusses with him word choice, sentence structure, the sounds of letters and words, and language patterns. Devices such as lists of service words in the areas of literature or related subject matter in the course, films on varies forms of literary work, newspaper and magazine articles, and books on the student's hobbies and interests may be used to help the student rapidly extend writing and reading vocabularies. Hence, a student must have many experiences so that he has much to talk about, and the teacher must have many reading materials

with variety for him to build these experiences.

The language-experience approach has a number of limitations when used as the only approach for remedial reading. These limitations do not exist when the approach is used in combination with a more structured approach since other approaches may emphasize the decoding aspects of reading. The most important limitation is its lack of sequential development of word recognition skills and it does not have vocabulary control, a student may never learn the basic sight words unless the teacher make a special effort to present them (Miller, 1971). However, the language-experience approach does provide a basic tool for the English teacher and is a strong supplement to the regular reading instruction program for students who are having reading problems at the secondary level.

The final implication deals with the responsibility of the content teacher. As stated before, the English and composition teacher is not responsible for teaching reading per se, however, he or she is responsible for helping students who have special reading problems to grasp the content of his or her subject matter. The directed reading activity is a method which the content teacher may used to help poor readers to comprehend the materials of the subject matter. In the directed reading activity, the teacher directs the student carefully toward desirable comprehension goals. The steps for the directed reading activity are:

1. Developing Readiness
   Oral control of vocabulary
   Background concepts
   Interest in reading the selection - Set purpose for reading

2. Directed Silent Reading
   Directed teacher guidance
   Immediate word recognition help

3. Comprehension Check and Skill Building
   Check comprehension
   Teach specific comprehension skills

4. Word Recognition Skill Building
   Most skill building comes at this point.

5. Purposeful Rereading
   Reread for another purpose as a comprehension skill check
   Reread for oral language development

6. Follow-up Activities
   All lessons do not have this step.

In summary, many educators have supported the notion that language development and dialect have great influence upon a student's ability to learn to read. The problem is due to the student attempting to learn to read a language which is different from the one he speaks. The content teacher can help the student with special language problems to grasp the content of the subject matter by several methods. These methods include three major areas: a program based on the language-experience approach, a program based on the directed reading activity, and a program designed to provide opportunities for the student to hear and to respond to language patterns represented in books.

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